

CASE STUDY (8)

KNOWLEDGE CREATION IN LARGE GROUPS. USE OF DI COMBINED WITH CROSS-PROFESSIONAL CHECKLIST

Consultant/case author:

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Areas:

communication training, team work, diversity management

Brief

The client organization is a large consultation and engineering company that annually invites all of its employees age 35 and under to undergo a collective learning experience. I was asked to prepare and conduct a one day workshop for a group of 140 participants¹.

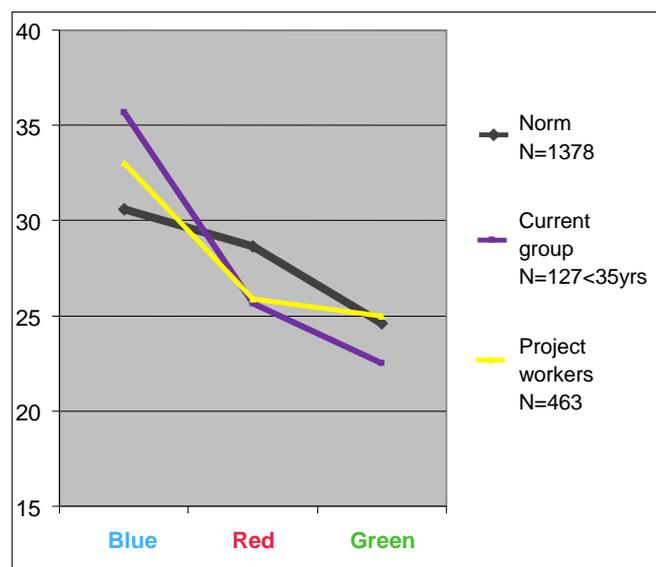
Action

I proposed a half day program for an experience-based, collective knowledge creation seminar. It would begin with the classical Diversity Icebreaker session and then continue to the challenges and concerns of the interdisciplinary work, using [Cooperation Checklist](#) measure as the starting point.

Diversity Icebreaker

After having explained the seminar's purpose, the participants filled out the questionnaire, were divided into groups and asked to describe the Red, Blue and Green categories (note: guidelines for dividing a group as large as this one are included in the newest edition of the DI User Manual). Afterwards, they presented the effects of their work on flipcharts and discussed together the learning points from that exercise.

An overview of the group's results on the Diversity Icebreaker dimensions is provided (right) in order to give a rough characteristic of the seminar's participants and challenges, other than related to interdisciplinary work, the group could have been facing. The current group's results (purple) on Red, Blue and Green are shown together with the Norwegian norm based on a N=1378 sample (black) and a norm showing results typical for project workers taking part in courses organized by Human Factors AS (yellow).



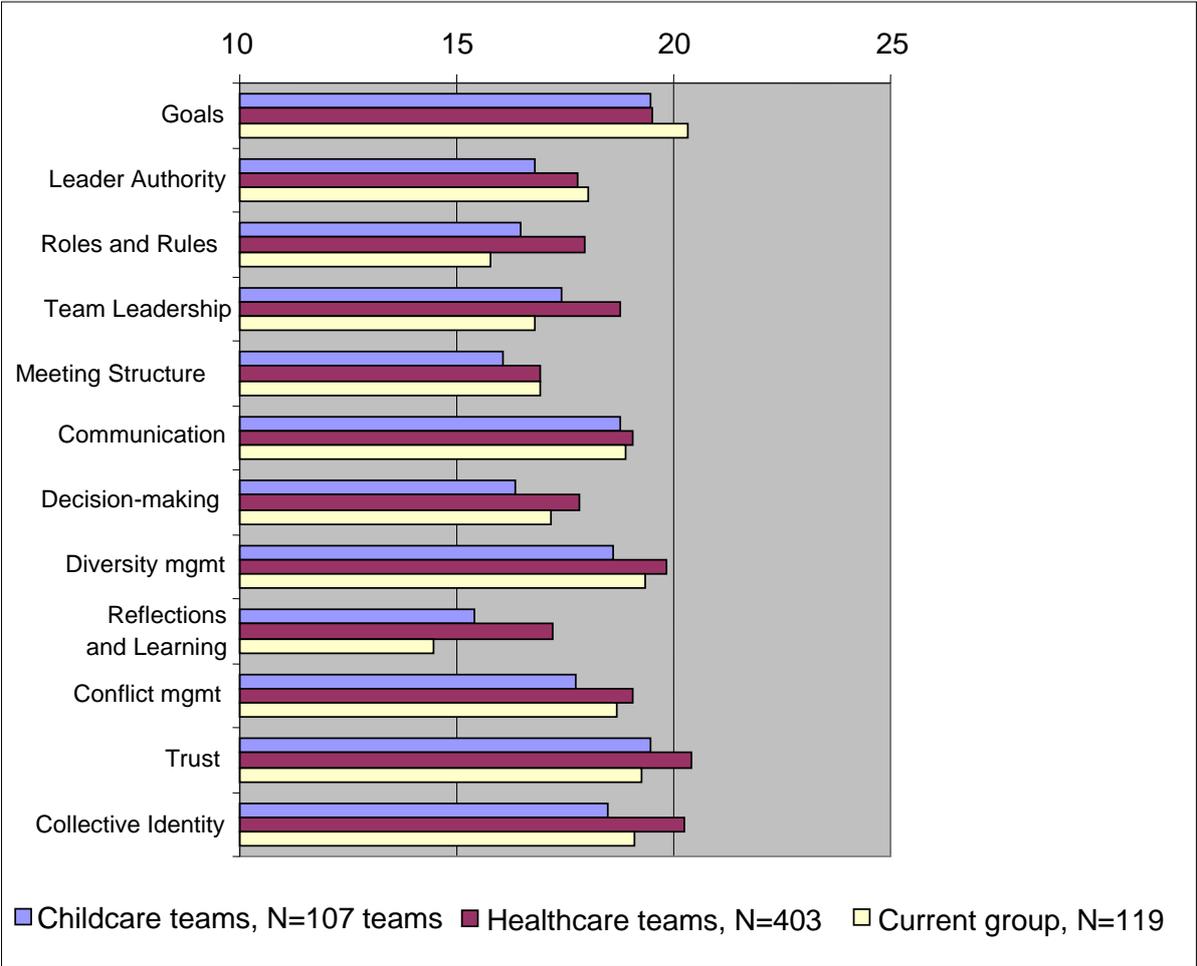
¹ Note: not all of the workshop's participants answered the Diversity Icebreaker and Cooperation Checklist questionnaires, discussed in this case study, and therefore the total number of respondents reported in the charts is lower than 140.

The results indicate that the participants score higher on Blue than the Norwegian norm and the project workers. At the same time, they score lower than the norm on Red. Such result is common among engineers – a profession, where the Blue qualities like precision and analytical skills are highly priced. However, where people work together, and especially in an interdisciplinary environment, interpersonal and communicational skills are equally important and need to be developed.

Cooperation Checklist

After the pause following the Diversity Icebreaker seminar, the participants evaluated the team/project they were closely related to by filling out the Cooperation Checklist. The measure is primarily applied as a tool for reflection in seminars where diversity is a core issue. The multifaceted scope of CC increases understanding of the complexities the team is facing, and also highlights that whether a team success depends on all the areas included in the measure.

The CC results of the engineers participating in this seminar are shown below. The current group results (light yellow) are compared with results representing childcare sector workers evaluating their teams (blue, N=380 respondents) and healthcare sectors (purple, N=403 respondents).



The participant’s results show that they score higher on Goals and Leader authority, whereas they score lower on Roles and Rules, Team Leadership and on Reflections and Learning.

Interdisciplinary work – group work and discussions

After completing the Cooperation Checklist the participants were divided into twelve groups and asked to choose one of the areas included in the CC (for an overview click [here](#)) and answer two following questions: “What challenges are we facing?” and “What should we do about it?” The discussions and group-work lasted one hour, during which the participants wrote the results down on flipcharts. Afterwards, in order to share and collectively reflect on the particular groups results, they were given half an hour to walk around and read the flipcharts and engage in discussions.

At the end of the day, I gave a presentation that focused on research results and relevant theoretical models for interdisciplinary work and connected them with the present group’s results.

Below is an example of one of the group’s work and my comments. This group worked with the *Diversity management* theme, which corresponds with the area 8 in the Cooperation Checklist.

Diversity Management.

What can we do better and smarter?

- Respect professional competences and personal qualities
- Quality control
- Diversity is a resource
- Mutual understanding and learning from each other
- A necessity
- Physical allocation of professionals in groups
- Knowledge about others’ competences can foster utilization of diversity
- Organize
- Selling interdisciplinary outside others’ competences inside the organization, for example with making the effects visible, making oneself aware of it.
- Communication

My comment:

It is important here to really get to know each other, sell in each other’s competences while highlighting processes and results at the same time. This cannot be done under one single seminar but has to be part of a longer process, where openness and trust play the key roles. In the Diversity Icebreaker Personal Workbook you will find exercises that can help you with making it a gradually increasing, daily practice.

Results

A collective report covering each of the twelve focus areas the groups worked with, along with the group’s results and comments, was prepared. It was later titled “The way to work interdisciplinary in our organization – perspectives from members aged 35 or under” and sent to all participants.

About the author:

Bjørn Z. Ekelund is a Norwegian organizational psychologist with 25 years of experience in managing small consultant companies, founder of Human Factors AS and creator as well as developer of the Diversity Icebreaker. In 2008 he was awarded with the prize “Best consultant of the year” for his international breakthrough with this concept. Read more [about Bjørn](#) and visit his [blog about Diversity Icebreaker](#).

